

BOOK REVIEWS

Galen on Anatomical Procedures. Translation of the surviving books with introduction and notes. By Charles Singer. (Pp. xxvi + 289; illustrated. 37s. 6d.) Oxford University Press. London: Cumberlege. 1956.

In the introduction to this work the translator writes "I believe that the text was taken down in shorthand and that it repeats substantially the actual words of Galen. There is no comparable work in ancient literature". Professor Singer has done the medical profession a great service in making these lectures available to English-speaking readers. Not only does the book show us the considerable amount of detailed anatomy known before the Renaissance, but incidentally it furnishes us with a lot of interesting information as to how human anatomy was learnt. Though most dissections were performed on monkeys (both live and dead) we learn that opportunities were taken to dissect the bodies of human enemies slain in battle or those of "men condemned to death and thrown to the wild beasts, or brigands lying unburied on a hillside". Sometimes the bodies of exposed infants were dissected.

Galen frequently takes the opportunity to bring in a clinical case bearing on the anatomical part described; thus he relates an interesting case in which a wrestler received a blow on the sternum which was followed by necrosis. Galen removed the dead bone and though the heart was exposed the patient made a good recovery. Physiologists will be interested to read Galen's account of his experiments on the spinal cord and his careful discrimination of the results.

The book contains a series of 26 figures which elucidate the text, and the translator has added fifteen pages of valuable notes. The translation reads well and the modern names of the muscles and viscera are inserted in brackets after their description. In most places the description is clear and easy to follow. This book should be in every medical library.

Textbook of Endocrinology. Edited by Robert H. Williams, M.D. 2nd edition. (Pp. xii + 776; 173 figs. 91s.) Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Company. 1955.

The plethora of articles on endocrinology is paralleled by that of textbooks on the subject and the prospect of reviewing yet another is not inviting. This volume, however, is fascinating from cover to cover. It is written by a group of ten leading American Authorities in various fields of Endocrinology and the different chapters are almost uniformly readable, comprehensive and up to date. Each gland is dealt with in a separate chapter in which is set out its anatomy and physiology at some length. This is particularly valuable to the student and practitioner who cannot hope to digest the enormous amount of literature on these matters which appears each year, yet some knowledge of this fundamental work is essential if he is to be able to appreciate the significance of various symptoms and signs, the value of new tests or the objectives of new forms of treatment.

In a work of this size it is easy to find fault with isolated statements. Thus it is said that the disease that is the most difficult to differentiate from Simmonds's disease is anorexia nervosa. Surely such a statement is archaic? It seems curious to find the term Simmonds's disease used in the broad sense and Sheehan's disease as a sub-heading for patients with post-partum pituitary necrosis since Simmonds's original case should presumably qualify for this title of Sheehan's disease. In another place it is stated that hyalinized forms of basophil cells in the anterior lobe of the pituitary gland are often increased in Addison's disease to a point where they are more common than the normal type—surely another misstatement?

Only one chapter strikes a grating note, the chapter on neuro-endocrinology. It has long been fashionable to blame "the glands" for any condition which has no known cause, and the psychiatrist has made great play with "the glands" in recent years. The section dealing with adipo-genital dystrophy, in particular, does not conform with the ideas of most endocrinologists in this country and the suggestion that such cases should receive chorionic gonadotrophin is alarming. Fortunately, it is followed by an excellent chapter on obesity which puts the matter in perspective.

The book contains a number of misprints but, altogether, it is an excellent piece of work.